Narration of a friendly Sioux /

NARRATION OF A FRIENDLY SIOUX.* BY SNANA, THE RESCUER OF MARY SCHWANDT.

* The following notes, contributed by Mr. Robert I. Holcombe, of St. Paul, in explanation of some parts of this narration, may be helpful to the reader. With a few slight changes the story is here given as Snana wrote it.

Mahkpia-hoto-win, in translation Gray Cloud, was a noted Sioux woman of early times who lived on the well known island of the Mississippi below St. Paul, which still bears her English name. She was first married to a white trader named Anderson, by whom she had two children, Angus and Jennie. The latter became the wife of Andrew Robertson, who became prominent in Indian affairs in Minnesota.

After Anderson's death, which occurred in Canada, Gray Cloud was married to Hazen P. Mooer, another white trader, who was a Massachusetts man by birth. By the latter marriage she had two children, Mary and Jane Ann, of whom the latter died unmarried. Mary was married to John Brown, a brother of Major Joseph R. Brown, and is still living at Inver Grove, near St. Paul.

Snana (pronounced Snah-nah) was born at Mendota in 1839. Her name means tinkling. Her mother was Wamnuka, which means a small ovate bead, called by the traders a barleycorn. She was a member of the Kaposia band of Sioux, whose village was on the west side of the Mississippi about four miles below St. Paul.

Dr. Williamson established a mission school at Kaposia in November 1846. Snana entered this school when she was about ten years old, and continued as a pupil there during three years.

She was married to Wakeah Washta (Good Thunder) when she was only fifteen years of age, and soon after accompanied her husband and the other members of the Kaposia, band to the reservation on the upper Minnesota river set apart for the Indians by the treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux in 1851. She and her husband were Christian Indians, and for some years lived in a log house and “in civilization” at the Lower or Redwood Agency, on the south side of the Minnesota, two miles southeast from where the village of Morton now stands.

The Lower Agency was the scene of the outbreak of the Sioux on the morning of August 18th, 1862. The Christian Indians were of course opposed to the uprising and the war; but in time they all, or very nearly all, were swept into it, some by inclination and others by the force of public sentiment and through fear and coercion. Good Thunder and his wife. and the other Indians who were “in civilization” at the Lower Agency, were obliged to leave their houses, remove a few miles westward to Little Crow's village, and take up new abodes there in tepees.

It was on the fourth day of the outbreak when Snana purchased Mary Schwandt from her captor. This act, which doubtless saved the life of an innocent young girl, was wholly Snana's; her husband was away from home at the time.

Mary Schwandt was then fourteen years old. Her story of her captivity is published in the sixth volume of these Historical Collections (pages 461–474).

After Snana had restored Mary Schwandt to the whites at Camp Release, she and her husband came down with other Indians to Fort Snelling, where they were encamped for some time. Here, in the following.winter, her two children died; and soon after their death she went to Faribault, and lived there for some years.

Later she removed to Santee Agency, Nebraska, Where she was again married, this time to another man of her race whose Indian name was Mazazezee (Brass), his English

name being Charles Brass. He was for several years a scout in the United States military service, and died from injuries received while scouting under Generals Terry and Custer. Shana (or Mrs. Maggie Brass, this being her English name) was afterward employed in the Government school at Santee Agency, and has lived on the farm allotted to her there. Her son, William Brass, has received an education in the Government school at Genoa, Nebraska. She also has two adopted daughters, both Indians.

Her name appears, with the few others, upon the monument erected by the Minnesota Valley Historical Society. at Morton, in commemoration the services of the Indians who saved the lives of White persons and were true in their fidelity to the whites through out the great Sioux War in Minnesota in 1862.

The spelling of the foregoing Dakota (Sioux) proper names conforms with their pronunciation, giving to the letters their usual English sounds. It therefore differs somewhat from the system used by Rev. Stephen R. Riggs in his Dictionary of the Dakota Language, which gives mostly the French sounds for vowels and employs ten peculiarly marked consonants. such as cannot be supplied by our English fonts of type. A final syllable, win, is often added in a Dakota name, as that of Gray Cloud, to indicate that it is a feminine name.

As I was asked to write my experience of the outbreak of 1862, I must begin from my earliest days of my life as much as I can remember.

My mother's aunt was married to a white man, and her name was Gray Cloud; so her daughters were half-breeds. As I was related to those folks, I lived with one and another from time to time. These two daughters' names are Mary Brown and Jennie Robertson. At the time I lived with Mary Brown, there was a schoolhouse near, in which I was a day scholar for two years. There were three other Indian girls besides myself. When these two years of my schooling had expired, I began to board with the family of Dr. Thomas

S. Williamson, where the schoolhouse was located. We were taught by Dr. Williamson's sister, whose name was Jane Williamson.

Before we boarded at Dr. Williamson's, it was very difficult for us to go to school at this special period of time, for the Indians said that we would spend money for doing this; and they tried to discourage us by scolding, and pretended to punish 428 us, and tried every way to stop us. It was three years altogether in regard to my schooling, as day scholar and boarding at the schoolhouse. By the teaching and helping of the kind family of Dr. Williamson, we had a very good opportunity, and made use of those three years. I got so that I could read the fourth reader by the time I left the school.

It was then my mother came and I went home with her to the Indian village. She dressed me up in Indian costume, but as I had been living among the white people mostly I was bashful to go out in Indian style, and for some days I stayed inside the tent where many people could not see me. But after years of living among them and being dressed in my own people's costume, I never forgot what I learned towards the white people's ways, their language, their civilization, and so forth. Although dressed in Indian costume, I thought of myself as a white lady in my mind and in my thoughts.

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An Indian man whose name was Good Thunder then offered some special things to my mother for me to be his wife, which was, as we may say, legal marriage among the Indians. But I insisted that, if I were to marry, I would marry legally in church; so we did, and were married in the Protestant Episcopal church.

Some years after we got married, we were the first ones to enter the Christian life, which was in 1861. We were confirmed in the same church. On account of our becoming Christians we were ridiculed by the Indians who were not yet taught the gospel of Jesus and who could not yet understand what Christianity meant.

I want everybody to understand that what little education I have was taught me by the kind family of Dr. Williamson. It has been of very great use to me all through my life; and it led me from the darkness of superstition to the light of Christianity in those dark days among my people.

Then came the dreadful outbreak of 1862. About eight days before the massacre, my oldest daughter had died, and hence my heart was still aching when the outbreak occurred. Two of my uncles went out to see the outbreak, and I told them that if they should happen to see any girl I wished them not to hurt her but bring her to me that I might keep her for a length of time. One evening one of my uncles came to me and said that he had not found any girl, but that there was a young man who brought a nice looking girl. I asked my mother to go and bring this girl to me; and my uncle, having heard of our conversation, advised my mother that she ought to take something along with her in order to buy this girl. Hence i told her to take my pony with her, which she did.

When she brought this girl, whose name was Mary Schwandt, she was much larger than the one I had lost, who was only seven years old; but my heart was so sad that I was willing to take any girl at that time. The reason why I wished to keep this girl was to have her in place of the one I lost. So I loved her and pitied her, and she was dear to me just the same as my own daughter.

During the outbreak, when some of the Indians got killed, they began to kill some of the captives. At such times I always hid my dear captive white girl. At one time the Indians 430 reported that one of the captives was shot down, and also that another one, at Shakopee's camp, had her throat cut; and I thought to myself that if they would kill my girl they must kill me first. Though I had two of my own children at that time with me, I thought of this girl just as much as of the others.

I made her dress in Indian style, thinking that the Indians would not touch her when dressed in Indian costume. I always went with her wherever she went, both in daytime and

night. Good ThUnder never helped me in any way to take care of this girl, but he always went with the men wherever they went. Only my mother helped me to take care of her; especially whenever she would wash, she always provided the soap and towel.

The soldiers seemed not to come near to us, but instead of that they could be heard at a distance beating the drum day after day, which I did not understand. Of course we who had captives wished the soldiers to come to us or to kill all the bad Indians.

Once, when the soldiers came near us. all the bad Indians were trying to skip from the country, mean and angry; but at this time I dug a hole inside my tent and put some poles across, and then spread my blankets over and sat on top of them, as if nothing unusual had happened. But who do you suppose were inside the hole? My dear captive girl, Mary Schwandt, and my own two little children. When the soldiers camped beside us, my heart was full of joy.

General Sibley was in command of the army, and he advised us to camp inside of his circle, which we did. He was so kind that he provided for us some food just the same as the soldiers had; and I thought that this was something new to. me in the midst of my late troubles. When I turned this dear child over to the soldiers my heart ached again; but afterward I knew that I had done something which was right.

From that day I never saw her nor knew where she was for thirty-two years, until the autumn of 1894; when I learned that she lives in St. Paul, being the wife of Mr. William Schmidt. Soon I went to visit her, and I was respected and treated well. It was just as if I went to visit my own child.